

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-10

WASHINGTON POST
19 June 1984

Judge Allows House Arrest For Bulgarian

By Michael Dobbs
Washington Post Foreign Service

PARIS, June 18—An Italian investigating magistrate today ordered that a Bulgarian held as a suspect in the shooting of Pope John Paul II be taken from prison and held under house arrest following a defense request that he be allowed to receive special medical treatment.

It is the second time in six months that Sergei I. Antonov, deputy manager of the Bulgarian state airlines Balkan Air, has been placed under house arrest rather than being held in prison.

Antonov is one of three Bulgarians and five Turks whose indictment has been requested by the state prosecutor investigating a conspiracy to murder the pope.

In a telephone interview from Rome, Antonov's lawyer, Giuseppe Consolo, said that his client's release from prison was a "positive sign."

He said that the investigating magistrate, Judge Ilario Martella, had granted the defense request despite objections by the state prosecutor.

Martella is awaiting a defense submission that he will weigh against the prosecutor's report, details of which were reported by The Washington Post today, before deciding whether to send Antonov to trial.

Defense lawyers have requested a postponement in the June 20 deadline for making their submission to Martella on the grounds that they have so far had only partial access to the 25,000 pages of evidence drawn up in the case.

In today's order, Martella stipulated that Antonov stay in a different apartment from the one he used last time because police complained that one was too difficult to guard.

The 36-year-old Bulgarian was first granted house arrest last December because of failing health after 13 months in prison. He was returned to prison in March after the prosecution appealed to a higher court.

Consolo said that Antonov, whose mental and physical condition has deteriorated in prison, has circulatory and heart problems.

Mehmet Ali Agca, the man who shot the pope in St Peter's Square in Rome on May 13, 1981, has accused Antonov of being part of a conspiracy by the Bulgarian security services.

Agca's credibility as a witness has been challenged by defense lawyers on the grounds that he has withdrawn substantial chunks of testimony about Antonov and can be shown to have lied or been mistaken about some key points since he started talking about a "Bulgarian connection" to Judge Martella in May 1982.